

Selkirk Purchase of the Red River Valley

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THE SELKIRK PURCHASE OF THE RED RIVER VALLEY, 1811

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Lord Selkirk bought his way into the Hudson's Bay Company (pp. 538-540). His ambition was to found a settlement in the Red River Valley, now largely a part of Manitoba, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Fur-trading concerns such as the Hudson's Bay Company had not been friendly to farmers and agriculture, for these destroyed the fur-bearing animals and ousted Indians and trappers. That Selkirk's plan was accepted by the Company (pp. 540-550) is a tribute to his capacity. The settlement, commenced in 1811-12, was sixty years later to form the nucleus of the first prairie Province in the newly established Dominion of Canada.

THE fur trade as a vital factor in the settlement of the West has scarcely been adequately treated by students of history and economics. Much attention, however, has been given to the West as a fur-trade country—how the lure for skins and peltries carried the trader from the Hudson Bay and the Atlantic seaboard into the interior of North America and finally completely across the continent has been oftentimes described; the history of the establishment of fur companies has been meticulously recorded; the organization of the fur industry on a big business scale has been observed in considerable detail; little of the rivalry between competing concerns has been left to the imagination; the fur trade as a factor in diplomacy between nations has been given much careful study; many authorities have forcibly pointed out the incompatibility of the interests of the fur trade and the purposes of colonization; and the picturesque activities of the fur traders themselves have been repeatedly described.¹

¹ See especially: Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (New Haven, 1930); Wayne Edson Stevens, *The North West Fur Trade, 1763-1800* (Urbana, 1928); Gordon Charles Davidson, *The North West Company* (Berkeley, 1918); George Bryce, *The Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company* (London, n. d.); Beckles Willson, *The Great Company (1667-1871), Being a History of the Honourable Company of Merchants-Adventurers trading into Hudson's Bay* (2 vols., London, 1900); Wilson Porter Shortridge, *The Transition of a Typical Frontier with illustrations from The Life of Henry Hastings Sibley* (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1922); John Perry Pritchett, "Some Red River Fur-Trade Activities," *Minnesota History Bulletin*, vol. v, pp. 401 ff.; Wayne E. Stevens, "The Organization of the British Fur Trade, 1760-1800," *Mississippi*

Little, however, has been done to show that it was the fur trade that first opened up the interior of North America and paved the way for the advance of settlement. It was the explorer and the fur trader that first penetrated the wilderness, made contacts with the Indians, learned of the natural resources of the country and communicated their knowledge of them to the oncoming tide of settlers.² The intensive furring of a region soon exhausted it of the best fur-bearing animals, and with this the trader pushed on to fresher fields and established a new frontier, the evacuated region becoming the home of the first wave of agricultural settlers. It is true that at times the fur trader was forced to establish a new frontier by the rapid advance of settlement, but this was not the common practice, for by the time that the settler reached the fur country the best of the fur-bearing animals of that region had largely disappeared and the trader was ready to move on to a new El Dorado.

There are not wanting many instances to show that the fur trade contributed directly to settlement. As the fur trader pushed across the continent, supply posts were established here and there at points of vantage around which later grew up many of the present thriving towns and cities in the United States and Canada. Often the settlements at these points were commenced not by bona fide farmers but rather by discharged and retired traders who had married squaws and had families and were practically forced by the circumstances to remain in the Indian country. Few traders on being discharged or retired ever took their "breed" families to the land of their birth or to the centers of eastern civilization. Though some of them "pensioned" off their wives to other traders and re-

Valley Historical Review, vol. iii, pp. 172 ff.; Sir William Schooling, *The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay during Two Hundred and Fifty Years, 1670-1920* (London, 1920); Charles Bert Reed, *Masters of the Wilderness* (Chicago, 1914).

² The fur trader did not consciously encourage settlement, for generally the interests of fur trade and the purposes of settlement were incompatible. Despite his deliberate attempts to stay the advance of settlers, however, the trader in his letters home to relatives and friends often inadvertently encouraged it through lucid descriptions of the beauties of the scenery, the fertility of the soil, and the salubriousness of the climate.

turned home to live their declining days, the great majority of them remained in the land where they had spent the best part of their lives.³

Though it was the general practice of fur companies to oppose the establishment of agrarian communities in their midst, there is at least one notable exception to this, and that is the Red River Settlement planted by Thomas Douglas,⁴ the fifth Earl of Selkirk, on the Red River of the North under the aegis of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Hudson's Bay Company, chartered in 1670 and owner in fee simple of all the territory drained by the waters flowing into Hudson Bay, favored the founding of this Settlement, for it had a very definite place in its plans⁵—drafted to assist it in recuperating from the keen competition of the North West Company, a Canadian fur-trading combine organized in the last quarter of the eighteenth century with headquarters at Montreal.

³ An excellent illustration of the intermarriage of fur traders and squaws is found in the following extract from a letter of John Macdonell (a North West Company employee for some eighteen years) to his brother Miles Macdonell (the first governor of the Red River Settlement), dated June 27, 1812 (Public Archives of Canada, Miles Macdonell, Selkirk Settlement, 1811-1812, And Various, 1763-1812, p. 149): "I take down [to Canada] my N. W. [North West] wife & two boys & a girl in addition to the two boys & girl I have already below. The children I propose giving common education so that they may work their way thro' life in some honest calling. The mother has been my constant companion these eighteen years and under my protection since her twelfth year. I find it cruel to turn her off in this country and to tear her children from her. My intentions are to settle something upon her to enable her to live in a comfortable obscure mediocrity." Poitras (Macdonell's wife) never got down to Canada; she was left at Fort William to live on £30 a year derived from a settlement of £500. It was arranged that after her death the original capital was to revert to their children in equal shares. See John Macdonell to Miles, Fort William, July 18, 1812, Pub. Arch. Can., Miles Macdonell, Selkirk Settlement, 1811-1812, And Various, 1763-1812, p. 155. See Rev. A. G. Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada From Lake Superior to the Pacific (1659-1895)* (Toronto, 1910), vol. i, pp. 53 ff., and George Bryce, *The Romantic Settlement of Lord Selkirk's Colonists* (Toronto, 1909), pp. 27 ff.

⁴ Lord Selkirk was born on June 20, 1771, at Saint Mary's Isle, the ancient seat of the Douglas family. He was educated at the University of Edinburgh. When the French Revolution broke out he, like so many other young men of promise in Britain at the time, became deeply interested in this great political upheaval and crossed the Channel to study it at first hand. But though, like others, he was soon disgusted and alienated by the horrid excesses of the revolutionaries, young Douglas was not driven to bitterness and reaction; this was probably due to his liberal upbringing. On returning to Scotland, he began to study Highland life with a view to improving the condition of the poor in the northern districts. As a result of this study his plans for Red River colonization were evolved.

⁵ In a statement dated March 18, 1815, and sent by Joseph Berens, President of the Hudson's Bay Company, to Lord Bathurst (Secretary for War and the Colonies), an explanation is given of the part the Red River Settlement was intended to play in the plans of the Hudson's Bay Company: "The servants of the Hudson's Bay Company employed in the fur-trade, have hitherto been fed with provisions exported from England. Of late

For several years prior to 1807, Lord Selkirk was interested in the establishment of a settlement in the interior of British North America. As early as March 31, 1802, in a memorial to Lord Pelham, secretary of State, he suggested "that a Colony should be established expressly for Irish Catholics in some unoccupied part of North America, that every thing should there be arranged to suit their Religious & National prejudices, that sufficient encouragement should be held out to settlers, & particularly that assistance should be given from the public purse to defray the expence of their passage. . . . Deeply impressed with the importance of these views, the Memorialist would not hesitate to devote his personal exertions & the best years of his life to the Service of his Country, in carrying them into execution—& if his plan should be adopted by Government, he would undertake to settle the proposed Colony in America, provided he were assured of effectual support & that a situation were chosen, possessed of those natural advantages which are requisite for success."⁶ Three days later in "Observations Supplementary to a Memorial relative to the Security of Ireland," the Earl specifically designated the Red River Valley as the situation possessed of those qualities most requisite for success. Downing Street was ad-

years this expense has been so enormous, that it has become very desirable to try the practicability of raising provisions within the territory itself; notwithstanding the unfavourable soil and climate of the settlements immediately adjacent to Hudson's Bay, there is a great deal of fertile lands in the interior of the country, where the climate is very good, and well fitted for the cultivation of grain.

"It did not appear probable that agriculture would be carried on with sufficient care and attention by servants in the immediate employment of the company; but by establishing independent settlers, and giving them freehold tenures of land, the company expected to obtain a certain supply of provisions at a moderate price. The company also entertained expectations of considerable eventual benefit, from the improvement of their landed property by means of agricultural settlements. Having a due regard to the implied conditions of their charter, they deemed it a duty incumbent on them (as soon as the practicability of agricultural improvements was demonstrated) to give a liberal degree of encouragement to an experiment, which, independently of the advantages, promised to have the most beneficial effects on the civilization of the Indians.

"With these views the company were induced, in the year 1811, to dispose of a large tract of their lands to the Earl of Selkirk, in whose hands they trusted that the experiment would be prosecuted with due attention, as the grant was made, subject to adequate conditions of settlement." Pub. Arch. Can., Colonial Office Records, ser. Q, vol. 133, pp. 59 ff. This source will hereafter be referred to as C. O. R.

⁶ C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 293, pp. 172-177, A Proposal tending to the Permanent Security of Ireland.

vised that no large tract of land remained unsettled on the Atlantic seaboard, "except barren & frozen deserts." If "a sufficient extent of good soil in a temperate climate" were found it would be obligatory to "go far inland." "This inconvenience," however, was not to be regarded as "an insurmountable obstacle to the prosperity of a Colony;" in fact, the advantages of an interior situation considerably outweighed all the inconveniences. "At the western extremity of Canada, upon the waters which fall into Lake Winnipeck [Winnipeg], & uniting in the great River of Port Nelson, discharge themselves into Hudson's Bay, is a Country as fertile, & a climate far more temperate than the Shores of the Atlantic under the same parallel, & not more severe than that of Germany & Poland. Here, therefore the Colonists may, with a moderate exertion of industry, be certain of a comfortable subsistence, & they may also raise some valuable objects of exportation."⁷

In the eyes of the author of "Observations Supplementary," "the greatest impediment" to the establishment of a colony in the trans-Red River West appeared to be the Hudson's Bay Company monopoly "which the possessors" could hardly "be expected easily to relinquish." This, the greatest obstacle, however, might with a degree of ease be surmounted. The Hudson's Bay Company monopoly could be abolished with ample indemnification, certainly "without any burden," and, "perhaps even with advantage to the Revenue." There was little that was either new or original in the Selkirk scheme for adjustment. Simply the essential features of the old French fur-trade licensing system would be revived and applied. "An annual duty should be paid for a license by every person trading with the Indians in the Countries connected with Hudson's Bay, each individual being limited to a particular district, in which no other should be allowed to interfere: that from the funds thus arising the Proprietors of Hudson's Bay Stock should receive an annual dividend equal to their net profits on an average of bye gone years." It was not regarded as being too sanguine to expect that in due course of time the duty

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-185.

from trading licenses would be large enough not only to "defray the expence of all the Civil and Military" administration of a colony, but "even to become a productive source of Revenue to the Mother Country."⁸

The Irish security plan, however, did not meet with the general approval of His Majesty's Government. Nearly two months lapsed before Selkirk received the slightest acknowledgement of his addresses. In late May, Lord Pelham came out emphatically against the "Proposal;" he was distinctly opposed to "colonizing at all en masse;" he saw "great difficulties & objections to Government undertaking to Transport & settle people from Ireland or elsewhere;" and, furthermore, any interference with Hudson Bay trade, "which takes such good care of itself," could not be brooked.⁹ The Secretary for War and Colonies, Lord Hobart, considered a reply unnecessary, even when the Earl wrote specially asking for the return of his memorial, stating that it surely could not be "the wish of Government that he should remain pledged to Services which they do not intend to accept."¹ Dugald Stewart was most curt and officious in his "Observations," telling Selkirk that if he pushed his requests too vehemently he would be charged with stimulating emigration, and that in any case he could more advantageously employ his services at home.²

Despite such discouraging opposition, Lord Selkirk was not daunted in his aims and ambitions. In June he sought an audience with Lord Hobart, which was granted on the eleventh. "The Proposal tending to the Permanent Security of Ireland" along with "Observations Supplementary" were reviewed and explained in detail. Lord Hobart gave the Earl little reason to be optimistic, although he did promise to reconsider the "whole proposition" and to give the government's final

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-182.

⁹ Conversation with Lord Pelham, April 2, 1802, Pub. Arch. Can., Selkirk Papers (hereafter referred to as Selkirk Papers), p. 13902; Pelham to Selkirk, May 27, 1802, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 293, pp. 167-168.

¹ Selkirk to Hobart, June 9, 1802, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 293, p. 188.

² Selkirk Papers, pp. 13898-13901, 13903-13906.

decision "in a few weeks." It would seem that at this stage of events the phase of the "Proposal" which dealt with the choice of a situation in the interior met with the most objection. The Secretary "hinted" in the conference that the government would probably be more willing to grant lands for settlement on Prince Edward Island than in the West.³

Several weeks passed and Selkirk received no word from Downing Street. Officialdom's procrastination was disconcerting to say the least. By early July the Earl retained little expectation of approval of his Red River colonization plan. In fact so convinced was he now that the government would deem it inadmissible that he completely ceased all further agitation. By no means, however, at this date did he forego his "idealistic schemes" for Irish security. Rather it was the hope for government support and a situation on the Red River that was abandoned.⁴

To bring himself as nearly as possible in accord with the wishes of the government, Selkirk now turned his attention from the Hudson Bay territory to Prince Edward Island and Upper Canada.⁵ In late July, the British authorities brought themselves around to a point where they thought more or less favorably of overseas colonization; and in 1803 tracts of land on the eastern peninsula of Prince Edward Island and in western Upper Canada were granted to the Earl. Before these grants were made, however, Selkirk was persuaded to abandon his Irish security plan in its entirety. The government would not permit of Irish colonization; Lord Hobart maintained that "settlement should be begun with people more tractable than the Irish." The "wisdom" of the Secretary's suggestion was recognized by the Earl, and a scheme to divert the current of Scottish emigration from the United States toward his Majesty's Colonies was substituted for the Irish "Proposal." And in 1803 and 1804 detachments of Highland-

³ Selkirk to Hobart, July 6, 1802, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 293, pp. 201-202.

⁴ Selkirk to Hobart, July 6, 1802, Selkirk Papers, p. 13840.

⁵ Selkirk to Hobart, July 6, 1802, C. O. R., vol. 293, pp. 201-202; Hobart to Selkirk, July 30, 1802, Selkirk Papers, pp. 13851-13852.

ers were dispatched to Prince Edward Island and Upper Canada.⁶

In 1803-04 Lord Selkirk made an extended trip to Prince Edward Island, the Canadas, and the United States. While in the Canadas, especially at Montreal where he was sumptuously entertained by the "bourgeois" of the North West Company, his interest in the establishment of a settlement in the trans-Red River West was revived. After his return to Britain he came to realize that the only practical way of succeeding in the planting of a colony in the interior of British North America—it was in 1807 that the idea began to predominate in his mind—was to ally himself with either the Canadian traders or the Hudson's Bay Company.⁷ In the fur-trade war which was growing ever more bitter between the two great rivals, a neutral party, particularly settlers living in the thick of the fight, would, he saw, invite the animosity of both protagonists and the friendliness and support of neither. No longer was he of the opinion that by indemnification and a licensing system the interests of the fur companies and of colonization could be harmonized.⁸

After having thought the matter over long and carefully Selkirk decided upon what might easily seem at first glance the more unwise choice of the two—to throw in his lot with the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1808 that Company was on the verge of insolvency. For the past few years its dividends had been gradually shrinking; in fact this year the directors neither declared any dividends nor submitted a statement of

⁶ *Ibid.*; Selkirk to Hobart, August 21, 1802, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 293, pp. 219-222; Selkirk to Hobart, November 30, 1802, Selkirk Papers, pp. 13845-13846; Hobart to Hunter, February 28, 1803, C. O. R., ser. G, vol. 54, pt. 1, pp. 90-92; Earl of Selkirk, *Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland, with a view of the Causes and Probable Consequences of Emigration* (London, 1805), pp. 6, 176, 189-190; Colonial Secretary to Grant & Gore, Upper Canada, C. O. R., ser. G, vol. 55, pt. 1, pp. 89-90; Louis Aubrey Wood, *The Red River Colony* (Toronto, 1922), pp. 18-20.

⁷ *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America, since the connexion of the Right Hon. the Earl of Selkirk with the Hudson's Bay Company, and His Attempt to Establish a Colony on the Red River; with a Detailed Account of His Lordship's Military Expedition to, and Subsequent proceedings at Fort William, in Upper Canada* (London, 1817), pp. 1-3.

⁸ See above, p. 534, n. 8.

affairs to the stockholders.⁹ It seemed as if the Canadian Company had succeeded in beating the English competitor to its knees. Although it was true that trade rivalry was partially the cause of the lack of dividends, competition was not the chief factor. Since 1806 Napoleon had been enforcing with great severity his Continental policy—the shutting out of British goods from European markets. Consequently the foreign fur buyers—German, French, and Russian, who had been the Hudson's Bay Company's best customers, had failed to come to London for several years past. In 1808 the Company's warehouses were piled high with the greater part of three seasons' peltries and there was no prospect of sale. So depressing was the economic situation that in late December, 1808, the directors were driven to petition the Chancellor of the Exchequer for temporary assistance; the petition in January of the next year was transmitted by the Lords of the Treasury to the Board of Trade. After a careful consideration the Board of Trade reported that it "contained no proposition on which the Lords in this Council could offer any opinion to the Lords of the Treasury." Thus the Hudson's Bay Company was denied financial succor by the government.¹ A little later, however, after a request for a loan of £60,000—which was refused—the government did grant the corpora-

⁹ The Memorial and Petition of McTavish, Fraser & Co. and Inglis, Ellice & Co. of London, Merchants on their own behalf and on behalf of the other Persons interested in the North West Company of Fur Traders of Canada, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 130, pt. 2, p. 286; Simon McGillivray to McTavish, McGillivray & Co., June 1, 1811, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 153, pt. 3, pp. 615 ff.; *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*, p. 3.

¹ Public Record Office, London, England, Board of Trade Papers, ser. 1, vol. 42, no. 36, and ser. 5, vol. 18, no. 438. The following quotation from the petition is significant: "Fine Furs were, till after the Sales of 1806, bought by the Fur Merchants for the Fairs of Frankfurt and Leipsick for Petersburg & before the present War, for France. Since that year there has not been a Fur sold for exportation, and as a proof to your Lordships that the deficiency of Buyers did not arise from our holding back for a higher Market, We sold in 1806 for Seven Shillings per Skin Furs that, in the more quiet State of Europe in 1804 had brought us Twenty Shillings & Three Pence, & which for years previous to that time had sold for a similar price, & other depreciation prevailed, in about the same proportion, the whole of the Furs calculated for the Foreign Market, and in some instances Furs were sold for a lower Price than the Duties we had paid for them. Since that period no Orders have been received from abroad & our Warehouses are now filled with the most valuable productions of Three Years Import, that if sold at the prices of those years before the closing of the Ports on the Continent would have produced us at least £150,000."

tion permission to store furs free of duty for twelve months.²

Naturally not only had profits failed but the price of Hudson's Bay Company stock had fallen far below its normal value—from £250 a share to from £50 to £60. Selkirk now realized that for a comparatively small outlay of money he could buy up enough of the Company's stock to give him a controlling voice in its operations and thereby secure the land and aid he needed for the establishment of an agricultural settlement in the Red River Valley.³

Before committing himself to the venture, however, the Earl made shrewd inquiries into the nature and the validity of the charter of 1670 under which the Hudson's Bay Company was operating. In the course of investigations he consulted five of the leading legists of Great Britain—Sir Samuel Romilly, William Cruise, and John Bell, as well as the two distinguished pleaders, James Scarlett and George Holroyd. They declared unanimously that the charter was quite valid; that it made the Company sole proprietor of all the territories granted, with full powers of government including the appointment of sheriffs, the trial of lawbreakers, and the leasing or alienation of any part of its domain in fee simple.⁴

Convinced that the charter was unassailable, Selkirk began to buy up the Company's stock. This was in the middle of the year of 1808. In the first few months of the buying he was not alone. Singular as it may seem, associated with him was none other than the famed explorer and then the chief London director of the North West Company, Sir Alexander Mackenzie. Co-operative buying on the part of these two men, however, did not continue long. Just as soon as Selkirk's ulterior motives became apparent—that his investments in

² Pritchett, "Some Red River Fur-Trade Activities," *Minnesota History Bulletin*, vol. v, p. 404 n.

³ The Memorial and Petition of McTavish, Fraser & Co. and Inglis, Ellice & Co. of London, Merchants on their own behalf and on behalf of the other Persons interested in the North West Company of Fur Traders of Canada, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 130, pt. 2, p. 286; *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*, p. 3.

⁴ *Statement Respecting the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement upon the Red River, in North America; its Destruction in 1815 and 1816; and the Massacre of Governor Semple and His Party. With Observations Upon a Recent Publication, Entitled "A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries"* (London, 1817), p. 2, Appendix A, i-ii.

Hudson's Bay Company stock were decidedly more than mere financial speculations—Sir Alexander abruptly broke with him. Mackenzie, it seems, had undertaken the speculation with the intention of making the Hudson's Bay Company a North-westers' concern, although William McGillivray, a co-partner in the North West Company, some nine years afterwards stated most emphatically (McGillivray must always be accepted with reservation when he is writing upon the Hudson's Bay-North West Companies' struggles) that he did so "without any definite object . . . beyond possibly a resale at an enhanced price, when a sufficient amount [of stock] should have been procured to enable them to exercise a beneficial influence in the management of the Company's concerns, and thereby to increase the value of their stock." After much wrangling and threats of legal proceedings the two Scotchmen came to an arrangement, although it hardly can be said to have been an amicable one, since Selkirk secured control over the majority of shares acquired in joint account.⁵

The Mackenzie-Selkirk quarrel did not deter the Earl's plans one iota; on the contrary it rather stimulated them. Quietly and astutely Selkirk continued to purchase Hudson's Bay Company stock. Owners in many cases, owing to the hard times, were eager to sell. Selkirk's marriage into the Wedderburn-Colville family in 1807 gave impetus to the venture. Not only were the members of that family induced to increase their holdings, but influential friends of both families were persuaded to become shareholders in the great Company. In the end the whole group obtained, altogether, about one-third of the total stock.⁶

⁵ Mackenzie to Selkirk, June 27, 1808, Mackenzie to Selkirk, June 30, 1808, letter neither addressed nor signed, June 29, 1808, Alexander Mundell to Selkirk, June 30, 1808, Mackenzie to Selkirk, October 29, 1808, Selkirk Papers, pp. 1-8; *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*, pp. 3-4.

⁶ The total joint stock bought up by Selkirk and his connections is estimated at between £35,000 and £40,000. The Company's total stock in 1810-11 is figured around £103,000 to £105,000. See Letter from agents of the North West Company to H. Goulburn, March 18, 1815, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 133, p. 241; Simon McGillivray to McTavish, McGillivray & Co., June 1, 1811, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 153, pt. 3, p. 616; *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*, p. 4. Selkirk married Jean Wedderburn-Colville, the only daughter of James Wedderburn-Colville of Ochiltree and Crombie. At the time of the marriage the Wedderburn-Colville family had large investments in the Hudson's Bay Company.

Selkirk, having thus become by far the greatest influence in the Hudson's Bay Company, proposed to the directors that settlement be undertaken on certain of the charter lands south of Lake Winnipeg. He, himself, would assume in person only the nominal position of director in the enterprise. The suggestion, accepted by the governor and committee without enthusiasm, proved to be far from welcome to the officials of the Company at Hudson Bay. William Auld, superintendent at York Factory, "wrote letters to his employers calculated to induce them to abandon" the venture, and "entirely neglected the instructions which had been given him respecting the formation of a colony at Red River." When Selkirk, late in 1810, again urged upon the directors his proposal to people the Red River Valley and offered to take responsibility for the enterprise more directly upon his own shoulders, he was asked for a statement of the terms upon which he would agree to take over from the Company in his own name a tract of land for colonization, specifying in particular "what restrictions he would be prepared to consent to be imposed on the settlers" and what guarantee he would give to the monopoly against any infringement upon its trade and other rights and privileges. "In these circumstances Lord Selkirk was induced to make a proposal which met the views of the Directors, viz. to take upon himself the charge of forming the intended settlement on condition of the Company granting him a sufficient extent of land to afford an indemnification for the expense."⁷

It was on February 6, 1811, that the statement was duly submitted to the governing committee of the Company. For the next several weeks the governor and committee discussed the proposals pro and con. Much bitter opposition was expressed. Certain committee men saw grave consequences in departure from "traditional policy," in sacrificing "loyalty to the noble, the ancient founders," and in violating the "spirit

⁷ Quotations in the above paragraph were taken by Chester Martin (*Lord Selkirk's Work in Canada*, Oxford, 1916, p. 33) from Correspondence of Dunbar, Earl of Selkirk, and His Sons, in possession of Captain Hope, St. Mary's Isle, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland. See Willson, *The Great Company*, vol. ii, pp. 141-142.

of reverence for the history of our Company." But all to no avail. Selkirk's wishes were respected. Before, however, such an unusual and important transaction could be effected it was necessary to submit it to a general court of the shareholders for approval. This was insisted upon largely by Sir Alexander Mackenzie. Preparations essential to insure success having been taken by Selkirk and the directors, a meeting of the general court was announced for May, 1811. The court assembled, and the stockholders were informed that the governor and committee deemed it advantageous to grant the Earl of Selkirk 116,000 square miles of territory in Rupert's Land on condition that he establish an agricultural colony in accordance with certain specific terms.⁸

At once opposition was aroused, not so much within the Company itself as among the representatives of the North West Company in England. The leading North-wester in Britain at the time was Sir Alexander Mackenzie (brief references already have been made to him), a strong figure and the man who was to be Selkirk's chief antagonist outside of North America in the Red River Settlement activities. Born in the middle of the eighteenth century at Stornoway in the Hebrides, Mackenzie, after receiving some education, left Stornoway at a very early age and crossed the Atlantic to Canada. The exact date of his arrival at Montreal is uncertain. It is now an established fact that he was in Canada in 1776, although he may have come out before that year.⁹ Between 1779 and 1784 he was employed as a clerk in the counting-house of Gregory, McLeod and Company, a prominent Montreal commercial organization with large interests in the western fur trade. "Endowed by Nature with an inquisitive mind and enterprising spirit," the ordinary routine duties of an

⁸ Selkirk Papers, pp. 1920-1921; C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 133, pp. 59-61; letter from the Agents of the North West Company to H. Goulburn, March 18, 1815, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 133, pp. 241-242; extract of a letter from Simon McGillivray to William McGillivray, May 25, 1811, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 153, pt. 3, pp. 621-622; *Statement Respecting the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement upon the Red River in North America*, p. 7; *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*, pp. 4-5; Willson, *The Great Company*, vol. ii, pp. 142-143.

⁹ Hume Wrong, *Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Explorer and Fur-Trader* (Toronto, 1928), pp. 3-6.

office clerk did not appeal to young Mackenzie, and so in 1784 he quit the counting-house and "with a small adventure of goods" supplied by Gregory went to Detroit to seek his fortune. The next year he was made a partner or *bourgeois* in the "New Company"—the Gregory, McLeod, and Pond faction in opposition to the North West Company—and he proceeded at once to the distant upper Churchill River and its tributaries to traffic in furs. The district was rich in beaver, fisher, mink, and muskrat, and at the end of two seasons' trafficking Mackenzie's results were satisfying. Still the new Company was not successful, although it did secure a share of the trade. Finally, after bitter bloodshed and heavy financial losses, the two Canadian companies recognized the inefficacy of continued rivalry and united their interests in July, 1787.¹ Mackenzie obtained a good appointment in the new combine; he was put in charge of the difficult Athabasca department. Then came his momentous exploring trip to the Arctic. A lack of astronomical knowledge, however, caused him to go to Scotland for a year's study. On returning to the Northwest he led the expedition which reached the Pacific Ocean in 1793.² Never before had a white man crossed the continent north of Mexico. The greatness of his deeds was recognized in the knighthood which was conferred upon him by George III in 1802. Although he became one of the greatest of the "hyperborean nabobs" in the North West Company, Mackenzie was never on good terms with Simon McTavish, an original organizer and principal director of the Company. Partly out of McTavish's bearishness grew up the schism which produced the XY Company. Even after the death of "Le Marquis" (Simon McTavish) and the reunion of the two warring concerns there continued to be, for several years, a strong undercurrent of dissension between the heads of the erstwhile factions. Sir Alexander was not the

¹ Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal, on the River St. Lawrence, through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans; in the Years 1789 to 1793. With a Preliminary Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Fur Trade of that Country* (London, 1801), pp. xviii-xx.

² *Loc. cit.*

easiest man in the world to get along with (he was terribly obstinate); but he soon retired from active participation in the fur trade and returned to Britain, still continuing, however, to be a powerful and zealous guardian of the interests of the North West Company.³

When the governor and committee of the Hudson's Bay Company announced to the general court assembled in May, 1811, that they concurred in the Red River scheme of colonization, the North-westers in London became greatly alarmed. Mackenzie, however, was not particularly startled but rather disconcerted. For several months he had known of Selkirk's designs. In fact, immediately upon their estrangement, he advised the North West Company in no uncertain terms anent the Earl's activities. "He will put the North-West Company to a greater expense," he wrote to a co-partner, "than you seem to apprehend, and had the Company sacrificed £20,000, which might have secured a preponderance in the stock of the Hudson's Bay Company, it would have been money well spent." The warning, however, was not heeded. Not only was it ignored, but the North-westers desisted completely "from any further purchases" in Hudson's Bay Company stock.⁴ When in 1811 they realized the gravity of the situation it was much too late then to rectify the short-sightedness.

The London agents of the North West Company were of the opinion that Selkirk's project was simply a phase of the Hudson's Bay Company policy to strike a blow at Canadian trade. The trans-Red River West was not only an important source of furs for the Montreal traders, but it was a vital link in their line of communications to the vast regions westward and northward. If settlement were once begun it would increase and spread rapidly far beyond the districts sought by

³ Richardson to Ryland, October 21, 1802, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 293, pp. 231-238; "Some Account of the Trade Carried on by the North West Company," *Dominion of Canada. Report of the Public Archives for the Year 1928*, Appendix E, p. 61; Mackenzie, *Voyages*, pp. xviii-xxiii; Wrong, *Sir Alexander Mackenzie*, pp. 149 ff.; Davidson, *The North West Company*, chap. vi.

⁴ Letter from the Agents of the North West Company to H. Goulburn, March 18, 1815, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 133, pp. 141-142; L. Masson, *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest (Reminiscences of Roderic McKenzie)* (Quebec, 1889), vol. i, pp. 52-53.

the Earl. Until now the fur traders from the Canadas had carefully concealed from possible settlers any favorable reports of the agricultural possibilities of the country west of the Great Lakes; and until now their interests in that region had been opposed only by other traders. At last, however, the dreaded settlement was threatening them; and Mackenzie and the other leading North West agents in Britain, especially John Inglis and Edward Ellice, decided that the plan must be balked at all costs. At first they were content merely to ridicule the scheme, hoping that it would fall of its own weight; but when the enemy secured a preponderating influence in the English Company and that Company expressed approval of "the great design" then their anxiety became deeper and they resorted to contemptuous and abusive criticism.⁵

Immediately upon the governor's and the committee's announcement to the general court, the court was adjourned in order that the partners might have time to get fuller information upon, and study in detail, the contemplated measure. An opportunity was given to all stockholders to inspect the terms of the proposed grant at the office of the secretary of the Company.⁶ The adjournment gave Sir Alexander and the other London North-westerners a much desired chance to organize a formidable opposition. A deliberate attempt was made to prejudice the general public. Newspapers gullibly described the trans-Red River West as a cimmerian desert of primeval solitudes quite unsuited for the habitation of man and intended by nature only to be a permanent breeding place for wild animals. Even Selkirk was approached in the Pall Mall by an acquaintance who remarked: "By God, Sir, if you are bent on doing something futile, why do you not sow tares at

⁵ Simon McGillivray to McTavish, McGillivray & Co., June 1, 1811, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 153, pt. 3, pp. 611 ff.; *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*, pp. 9-10; Selkirk to the governor, deputy governor and committee of Hudson's Bay Company, February 14, 1815, Selkirk Papers, p. 1918.

⁶ *Statement Respecting the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement upon the Red River in North America*, p. 7; Simon McGillivray to McTavish, McGillivray & Co., June 1, 1811, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 153, pt. 3, p. 611.

home in order to reap wheat, or plough the desert of Sahara, which is so much nearer?"⁷

On May 30, the general court re-assembled. Just two days before it opened, three North-westerners—Simon McGillivray, Edward Ellice, and John Inglis—frantically bought up Hudson's Bay Company stock. McGillivray had for several weeks negotiated with a John Fish to secure his shares, "but when it came to the point of fixing a price, he [Fish] could not make up his own mind, and would not sell." In the end, however, the failure of McGillivray to acquire this stock made no real difference in the Canadian Company's designs, for Fish was persuaded to use his influence in opposing Lord Selkirk. The North West Company purchases, although quite inadequate to affect a decision of the court (shareholders were not entitled to vote until they had held stock for six months) gave them the right to attend its meetings, to enter into its debates, and to secure first-hand information in regard to its proceedings.⁸

Probably never in the past history of the Hudson's Bay Company had there been a session as lively as that which now took place. The three North-westerners present—Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Edward Ellice, and John Inglis—stormed and argued. A number of the original subscribers joined them when the secretary again presented the Selkirk request. The demand was clear. Selkirk wanted a grant in fee simple of a fertile tract in Rupert's Land—on the Red River if possible—for purposes of colonization. Assurances were given that it would be settled in a limited time, that the whole expense of government, of protection, and the satisfying of the Indian claims to the soil would be assumed by the proprietor. In return for this consideration the Hudson's Bay Company would be paid "ten shillings of lawful money of Great Britain," sup-

⁷ Willson, *The Great Company*, vol. ii, p. 143.

⁸ Selkirk Papers, pp. 1925-1926; Minute by Miles Macdonell, Golden Square, May 24, 1811, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 133, pp. 66-67; Simon McGillivray to McTavish, McGillivray & Co., June 1, 1811, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 153, pt. 3, pp. 611 ff.; Simon McGillivray to The Wintering Partners of the North West Company, April 9, 1812, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 150, pt. 1, pp. 180-181; *Statement Respecting the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement upon the Red River in North America*, pp. 7-9.

plied with 200 servants a year for a period of 10 years (their wages were, however, to be paid by the Company), and in addition a guarantee was given that the proposed colony would not encroach upon the Company's fur trade.⁹

This, the second, announcement brought forth a storm of bitter animadversion. Although the opposition was handicapped in numbers, readiness, and time, still it had become sufficiently well organized to draft a lengthy document of some 700 words in protest. Eight major causes for disapproval were enumerated:

[1] Because . . . there does not appear to be any adequate consideration stipulated for, between the said Company and the said Earl. The land proposed to be granted comprehends a Territory of about seventy thousand superficial miles, containing about forty-five millions of Acres, of that part of the Territory which is most valuable and fit for cultivation; and constitutes no inconsiderable portion of the Company's Capital Stock.

[2] Because if it be for the benefit of the said Company . . . to sell so large and valuable a portion of their Territory, the proper mode of doing so for the interest of the Stock-holders is obviously that which is usually adopted in the faithful execution of all trusts of a similar nature, namely to expose it to public sale, or at least to give such notoriety to the transaction, as to admit of competition between Individuals, who may be inclined to purchase. The necessity of such a mode in the present case is placed beyond all dispute by the fact that a more valuable consideration than that proposed by the said Earl, may now be obtained for the property in question.

[3] Because it does not appear that the said Earl is bound by the conditions of the Grant in a *sufficient penalty* to establish such a Settlement as will produce to the Company any substantial benefits; or to exercise such acts of ownership, as may be necessary to the ostensible objects of the Company in making the Grant. In all Grants recently made of lands by the Crown in British America provision is made for bona fide Settlements, not a mere nominal provision to give a colourable pretext for the alienation of public property, but such as to secure the actual residence of one person in proportion to twelve Acres. And it has been proved by experience and is clear . . . that the foregoing regulation adopted by His Majesty's Government is highly expedient and wise and was suggested by the evils which had formerly arisen from the possession of a large tract of land by one person, who could seldom even in the vicinity of a populous country procure a sufficient number of settlers to satisfy the Creditors of the original Grant. If with all the facilities afforded by a regular and extensive intercourse with Great Britain it was found impracticable to induce a very considerable number of persons to migrate, how much more insurmountable must be the difficulty of peo-

⁹ "Grant of Assiniboia to Lord Selkirk, by the Hudson's Bay Company, June 12, 1811," Martin, *Lord Selkirk's Work in Canada*, Appendix B, pp. 201-215. There exist a number of printed copies of this document, but most of them are full of discrepancies. This copy published by Martin is copied from the certified notarial copy deposited in 1822 with John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State, in the Monroe administration, by John Halkett, Selkirk's brother-in-law and one of his executors.

pling a region two thousand miles from any seaport and out of the reach of all those aids and comforts which are derived from Civil Society.

[4] Because upon a fair and impartial estimation of the future value and importance of the land proposed to be granted, and the limited and unproductive consideration to be given by the said Earl, your memorialists cannot conceive from the said Grant any other motive than to secure to the prosperity of the said Earl, at the expence of the Stockholders of the said Company, an immensely valuable landed estate.

[5] Because in the event of a settlement of the . . . Territory under the controul of another person than that of the Company, private traffic would be carried on between the settlers and the Indians, and clandestinely with traders from the United States and Canada which no ordinance of the Company could prevent. Besides it has been found that colonization is at all times unfavourable to the fur trade, and it is not very apparent to your Memorialists that the said Company has full power to exercise a final jurisdiction since various acts have been passed in contravention of the powers perhaps intended to be imparted in the Charter, more especially, the Act of the 43d of George III which gives the entire jurisdiction in criminal cases throughout the whole Indian territory to his Majesty's Courts of King's Bench in Upper and Lower Canada.

[6] Because under the foregoing circumstances such a settlement as that proposed would in process of time erect itself into a distinct interest adverse to that of the Company; become an Asylum for deserters from their Service and eventually render their authority in practice a mere nullity.

[7] Because from the situation of the Lands proposed to be granted and their contiguity to the United States the intercourse will be greater and the communication more easy between the frontier posts of the United States and the Settlement contemplated than between the said Settlement and Fort Nelson; hence the laws and regulations of the Company will be evaded and every expectation of revenue defeated in its very principle.

[8] Because your Memorialists do not perceive that in making such a grant according to the terms expressed in the agreement to be entered into sufficient regard is had to the difficulties in the way of carrying it into effect, or the sacrifices which the Company may be called upon to make. These reasons and many others which require more full illustration than the shortness of time between the last and present meeting would permit, appear to your Memorialists sufficiently cogent to prevent the Company from making the Grant under consideration, upon such terms as are proposed by the Earl of Selkirk.¹

This remonstrance was a very worthy document and, for the most part, it spoke truly in the interests of the Hudson's Bay Company as a fur-trading monopoly. It was, indeed, true that there was no "adequate consideration stipulated for between the said Company and the said Earl." Certainly ten

¹ "Protest of Proprietors of the Hudson's Bay Company against the Grant to Lord Selkirk," May 30, 1811, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 134, pt. 2, pp. 333-337. The "Protest" is signed by William Thwaites, Robert Whitehead, John Fish (stockholders of long standing in the Company), Edward Ellice, John Inglis, and Alexander Mackenzie (principals in the North West Company). Thwaites and Whitehead were next to Selkirk the two largest holders of stock in the Company. See *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*, p. 132.

shillings and the promise of supplying servants *which the Company was to support* was an insignificant price to pay for "a territory of about seventy thousand superficial miles, containing about forty-five millions of acres, of that part of the territory which is most valuable and fit for cultivation." Surely, too, it was only fair to the Company's subscribers "to expose" the land "to public sale, or at least give such notoriety to the transaction, as to admit of competition between individuals who may be inclined to purchase." There was reason and soundness, also, in some other particulars of the "Protest." Precedent went strongly to prove that "evils . . . had formerly arisen from the possession of a large tract of land by one person, who could seldom, even in the vicinity of a populous country procure a sufficient number of settlers to satisfy the Creditors of the original Grant. . . . How much more insurmountable must be the difficulty of peopling a region two thousand miles from any seaport, and out of the reach of all those aids and comforts which are derived from Civil Society." Time was to prove that "private traffic would be carried on between settlers and the Indians, and clandestinely with traders from the United States and Canada;" and time was forcibly to exemplify the contention that "colonization is at all times unfavourable to the fur trade." And, finally, time was to prove that the Company had not "full power to exercise a final jurisdiction."²

In other points, however, the "Protest" was unfair. A fair and impartial judgment might well have seen for the grant some other motive than to secure to the prosperity of the Earl, at the expense of the stockholders of the Company, an immensely valuable estate. For the support of such a view it is only necessary to look to Selkirk's colonization activities in Prince Edward Island and at Baldoon, Upper Canada. Nor was it reasonable to suppose at that time that for at least many years to come there would be more temptation to the settlers to look to the then distant American settlements in

² Pritchett, "Some Red River Fur-Trade Activities," *Minnesota History Bulletin*, vol. v, pp. 401-423.

the trans-Mississippi West³ for "intercourse" than to the ports on Hudson Bay. Prophetic, however, was the fear expressed that an insufficient "regard is had to the difficulties in the way of carrying it [the Settlement] into effect, or to the sacrifices which the Company may be called upon to make." No truer prophets of the future of the contemplated colony could have been found, indeed, than the men who signed the "Protest." Three out of the six were principals in the North West Company. Were they thinking, when they signed, of the "difficulties" and "sacrifices" with which they would try to burden the noble promoter of the emigration scheme if, as they feared, he should succeed in securing his grant? It is very probable, so prompt were they to prove in having recourse to questionable ways and means of impeding his plans. And does not their "Protest" seem ironical in the light of their fur-trade affiliations outside the Hudson's Bay Company? At the same time that they and their colleagues in British North America were engaged in a systematic and unscrupulous warfare to drive the English Company from its ancient charter fur preserves they were sanctimoniously protesting against possible injuries to that Company in granting land to the Earl of Selkirk. As subscribers they had, of course, the right to protest. But they should have been prepared, having invested in the stock of the Company in which a majority of the subscribers ruled, to accept calmly the decision of such a majority and not to give vent to bursts of rage and chagrin when they realized that they were beaten in a game which they had entered with motives at least as selfish as those of their opponents, and with an equal knowledge of the rules.

As was inevitable, the "Protest" proved ineffectual. The total sum of stock represented at the meeting was £44,850. Of this amount, £29,937 was in the hands of Selkirk and his friends. William Thwaites and Robert Whitehead, who were

³ In 1811 St. Louis, Louisiana Territory (in 1812 Louisiana Territory became Missouri Territory) was the nearest American outpost of civilization to the Hudson's Bay Company territory, and it was nothing more than a fur-trading post.

in opposition, owned something like £13,000, while Alexander Mackenzie, John Inglis, and Edward Ellice—the two last-named gentlemen, as has already been indicated, had only become proprietors of Hudson's Bay Company stock about forty-eight hours before the meeting, and hence could not vote—possessed collectively nearly £2,500. When a show of hands was called for, two-thirds of those present at the general court voted in favor of the proposal.⁴ The proceeding was momentous. At one fell swoop, the Earl of Selkirk secured, for the nominal sum of 10 shillings, 116,000 square miles of land—a district about 5 times the size of Scotland, or only 5,115 square miles less than the entire area of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, largely composed of soil as fine and fertile as any other in the world. A deed was drawn up and completed on June 12, 1811, making Selkirk owner of the grant in fee simple.⁵ Although it had been purchased at a trifling expense, before many years passed it was to cost the proprietor a rather mean figure. The boundaries of the District of Assiniboia, as it was called, were defined in the deed as:

Beginning on the western shore of Lake Winnipic otherwise Winnipeg at a point in fifty two degrees and thirty Minutes north latitude and thence running due west to the Lake Winnipigoos otherwise called Little Winnipeg then a Southerly direction through the said Lake so as to strike its western shore in latitude fifty two Degrees then due west to the place where the parallel of fifty two degrees North Latitude intersects the western branch of Red River otherwise called Assiniboyne River then due South from that point of intersection to the height of land which separates the waters running into Hudson's Bay from those of the Missouri and Mississippi then in an Easterly direction along the said height of land to the source of the River Winnipic or Winnipeg (meaning by such last mentioned River the principal branch of the waters which unite Lake Saginagas) thence along the main stream of these waters and the middle of the several Lakes through which they flow to the mouth of the Winnipic River and thence in a Northerly direction through the middle of Lake Winipic to the place of beginning.⁶

⁴ *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*, p. 5; George Bryce, "Lord Selkirk," *The Makers of Canada* (Toronto, 1906), vol. viii, p. 146; Willson, *The Great Company*, vol. ii, p. 145.

⁵ Letter from the Agents of the North West Company to H. Goulburn, March 18, 1815, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 133, pp. 241-242; *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*, p. 5; Willson, *The Great Company*, vol. ii, p. 147.

⁶ Martin, *Lord Selkirk's Work in Canada*, Appendix B, pp. 202-203.

More popularly speaking, the District extended from Big Island, in Lake Winnipeg on the north, to the watershed separating the Red River from the headwaters of the Mississippi on the south, and from almost the source of the Assiniboine River in the west to Lake of the Woods and the Lake Superior watershed on the east. By an examination of a map it will be observed that according to the present political territorial divisions, the original Assiniboia included parts of Manitoba, Ontario, Minnesota, and North Dakota.

Once again Selkirk had been successful in making a long stride towards the fulfillment of his Red River project. Just what his motives were in securing the Red River Valley was a question which evoked many and conflicting opinions from his contemporaries. Some, among whom were the North-westerners, declared that his mind was unbalanced. Others opined that he was seeking wealth through a speculation in real estate. William McGillivray attributed to him "an unquenchable thirst for land, and the speculations to which it gives rise." The majority of the North-westerners were of the decided opinion that his one and only object was to introduce into the Red River country "a sufficient number of persons to carry into effect . . . plans of aggression and competition against the North West Company;" in other words the "Noble Lord's" plot—which was "marked with more than the precaution of an American land-jobber," was to strike a blow at "the root of the North West Company, which it was intended to ruin."⁷

On the other hand the actual evidence available, as well

⁷ Simon McGillivray to the Wintering Partners of the North West Company, April 9, 1812, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 150, pt. 1, pp. 181 ff.; Simon McGillivray to McTavish, McGillivray & Co., June 1, 1811, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 153, pt. 3, pp. 611 ff.; extract of a letter from Simon McGillivray to William McGillivray, May 25, 1811, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 153, pt. 3, pp. 621-623; William McGillivray to Major Loring, November 28, 1815, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 133, pp. 227-228; McTavish, Fraser & Co., Inglis, Ellice & Co. to H. Goulburn, March 18, 1815, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 133, pp. 236, 238 ff.; Selkirk to the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company, February 14, 1815, C. O. R., ser. Q, vol. 133, pp. 72-75; Miles Macdonell to Selkirk, July 5, 1811, Miles Macdonell Letter Book, p. 254; Macdonell to Auld, December 25, 1811, Miles Macdonell Letter Book, p. 283; "Minute of Miles Macdonell," May 24, 1811, Selkirk Papers, pp. 1925-1926; John Strachan, *A Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Selkirk on His Settlement at the Red River, Near Hudson's Bay* (London, 1816), p. 10; *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*, pp. 9-10.

as the Earl's expressed purposes, go to show clearly that his motives were largely philanthropic—that he hoped to gain for himself only remuneration for his expenses and his due share of honor and fame as a national benefactor and as an empire-builder. The aims “upon which I have acted,” Selkirk wrote in 1816, “were based upon the importance of the Settlement on Red River in a national point of view,”⁸ and were concerned with “the important question whether extensive and fertile regions in British North America are ever to be inhabited by civilized society.”⁹ So determined was he “upon proving that it [the Red River Settlement] was neither a wild and visionary scheme, nor a trick and a cloak to cover sordid plans of aggression,” that he consistently rejected the idea of the coalition of the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies.¹ There is no good reason for disbelieving either that Selkirk was convinced that the great colonization movement in the United States could be duplicated in British North America or that he was anxious to add luster to the Douglas name by associating with it his great plans of imperial settlement. That just consideration in these matters has not even yet been fully given to Selkirk is not the least of the unmerited aspersions which have remained a tarnish upon his name.

In 1811-12 the first detachment of immigrants was despatched to the District of Assiniboia. Later in the decade several more contingents came. The annals of the West hold few tales more vivid and tragic than the settlement of the Red River. The planting of the colony across the eastern highway of the North West Company and the already existing cut-throat system of competition between the Montreal traders and the Hudson's Bay Company succeeded in all but ruining Lord Selkirk's scheme of colonization. It was not until after 1821, when the warring companies united, that the incipient settlement enjoyed a degree of peace and prosperity. Upon

⁸ Selkirk to Col. McDouall, March 30, 1816, Selkirk Papers, p. 2126.

⁹ *Statement Respecting the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement Upon the Red River in North America*, p. vii.

¹ Selkirk to Colville, quoted in Martin, *Lord Selkirk's Work in Canada*, pp. 191-192.

the death of Lord Selkirk in 1820, the governmental control of the colony was committed to his family. After some fourteen years of gross mismanagement, corrupt governors, ruinous experiments, and natural deterrents, the Selkirk régime fortunately ended. In 1834 the heirs of the noble Lord sold the vast Red River district back to the Hudson's Bay Company. ~~Twenty~~^{Twenty}-six years later, when the Company sold its territories to Canada, the district was organized into the Province of Manitoba and admitted into the newly established Dominion of Canada as the first prairie Province.



